

Sunday, September 17th, 2017

The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am. The liturgist will enter and take his/her seat. The pastor will follow, step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....

PRELUDE "Crown Him with Many Crowns" - Arr. Charles Callahan Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "Rejoice in the Day!" - Dan Dykema The Choir

After the Prelude, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 105 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 105)

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,

Make known his deeds among the peoples.

Sing praises to him and tell of all his wonderful works.

Glory in his holy name; seek the Lord and his strength.

Rejoice and seek the presence of the Lord continually!

Remember the wonderful works he has done and the judgments he uttered.

He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth.

O offspring of his servant Abraham, he is mindful of his covenant forever.

He remembers the promises he made for a thousand generations;

The covenant that he made with Abraham and swore to Isaac,

Which he confirmed to Israel as an everlasting covenant,

Saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.”

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,

Make known his deeds among the peoples.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer....

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Holy God, even as we bow before your Power and remember your promises, we read of your call to Abram and find it difficult to hope in what is unseen, to believe in what we cannot prove, to take the leap of faith that walking with you requires. But Lord, how we want to believe! Open our ears to hear your word. Open our wills to respond with renewed purpose. Open our lips to share the good news with the gentle authority of Christ. Free us, we pray, to trust you this day, that we may walk with you as Abram did. Open our minds and hearts to hear your call to bless the lives of others and to glorify your name in all the earth. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”, number 276 in our Hymnal.

The liturgist should step back from the microphone for the hymn.

***HYMN OF PRAISE**

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

The Hymnal #276

After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

We may confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord, but how we live tells a different story. The mistakes we make are due to our failure to make a total commitment to Jesus’ way. In penitence and faith, let us confess our sins before God and one another by praying together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a brief period of silent prayer. Let us pray...

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

(In Unison)

God of grace, you have called us to lives filled with meaning and true happiness, but we have allowed our fear of the unknown to keep us from moving forward in faith. We look forward to receiving your promises, but are unwilling to trust your timing. We depend on our own cunning rather than on your direction. We flex our muscles instead of relying on your mercy. Deliver us from our confusion, and forgive our foolishness wandering so that we may walk the path you have chosen for us.

Open our eyes to your Providence and Power so that we may be a blessing to others in your name.
Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION *Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.*

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Jesus the Son of God came to us who are sinners that we might know God does not condemn us, but in love sets us free from the burden of our guilt. The gospel we proclaim is one of forgiveness in Christ Jesus that brings new faith, new life, and eternal hope. Friends believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

To all who confess their departure from God's way, he grants His forgiveness and a restoration of His peace. May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.

After a few moments, the liturgist will step into pulpit and say...

"At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Pastor Mike."

The liturgist will take a seat.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

(All Singing)

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

"Blessed to Be a Blessing"

Object: Several Christian Bookmarks

Let the children know that you have a gift for them, and then give them each a Christian bookmark. Explain that you are "blessing" them - which means that you are giving them something very, very good. Tell them the story of how God blessed Abram, giving him a new land, and the promise of a great nation (Genesis 12:1-2). Then ask the children if God blessed Abram only to make him feel good. No! Let them know that God blessed him so that he would BE a blessing. Challenge the children to be a blessing to someone else by getting up and going out into the congregation to give their bookmark to someone else. When they return, ask how it made them feel to bless someone else. Then let them know that God always takes care of those who are a blessing to others, and give them each another bookmark to keep for themselves.

As the children leave, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

"Would all who are able, please stand and join in one voice to sing our next hymn, "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah", hymn number 281 in our hymnals.

*HYMN OF PREPARATION

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

The Hymnal #281

After the hymn, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

"Please be seated... This morning we are fortunate to have Katherine Phillips to tell us how we can be a blessing to others through the "Undie Sunday" project with the Magnolia Junior Charity League. Katherine..."

The liturgist will sit down until Katherine leaves the microphone.

A MINUTE FOR MISSION

"Undie Sunday"

Katherine Phillips

As soon as Katherine leaves the microphone, the Liturgist will step back into the lectern & say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

How are others to hear the good news of God that has meant so much to us? How will they

learn to build their lives on a solid foundation? With grateful hearts and eyes of faith, let us share our blessings with others as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.

THE OFFERTORY

"The King of Love My Shepherd Is"

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

***DOXOLOGY (In Unison)**

The Hymnal #592

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.***

After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

***OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray... Almighty God, you are the true giver of every good gift, so we dedicate all we have to your will and way. We set aside these tokens from the many blessings you have given us to serve you through our common ministry in Christ's name. May this church teach with the love and authority of Christ. May we venture into new territory with the courage of Abraham. May all we do be to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

"The Apostles' Creed"

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick & the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, & the life everlasting. Amen.

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.

THE ANTHEM

"Sing to the Lord a New Song" - Kenneth T. Kosche

The Choir

After the choir finishes, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say....

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the eleventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, beginning at the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1050 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

"By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven & as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore"

The liturgist will return to his seat either on the chancel or with family or friends in the congregation. The preacher will step into the pulpit & say...

Our sermon text today is taken from the twelfth chapter of Genesis, beginning at the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #9 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."

"So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sar'ai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and

all their possessions which they had gathered, & the persons that they had gotten in Haran; & they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

“Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.”

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“All In”

I for one am excited to be exploring God’s Story this year. A good story has a kind of power. The setting, the characters, and the surprise plot twists that leave you feeling like, “Oh, I didn’t see that coming.”

A big story this past week was the launch of the new Apple iPhone 10. Have you noticed how when you get a new phone or you do an update, Apple has all these terms and conditions. How many times have you just scrolled down and hit AGREE. We don’t even know what we’re agreeing to! Could’ve just signed away my first-born. I don’t care. Just give me some 2.0.

Maybe you heard about the first people who got in really big trouble not reading the apple terms and conditions?—Adam and Eve. Didn’t see that coming did you?

Last week, we travelled through the first 11 chapters of Genesis from Eden to Babel. If you missed last week, or forgot, let’s do a quick review.

God’s vision is to come down and be with us in a beautiful garden. The first two people reject God’s vision and their decision introduces sin into the human race and keeps us from community with God. But when things had gotten about as bad on earth as they can get, God made us a promise through Noah and launched a plan to get us back.

Today the story continues as we move on to the story of Abram.

When God scrambled the languages of the rich and powerful city-state of Babel in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates, the people scattered themselves. Into the vacuum left by the sudden collapse of Babel, came people drawn by the agricultural wealth possible in the rich lands of the Tigris’ and Euphrates’ Delta. They became worshipers of the moon god and they named themselves after their idol and became the Urim, the people of Ur.

Abram’s family was among them. In fact, his family profited more than most from the idolatry and superstitions found everywhere in Ur, making and selling idols to those who liked to worship gods with no strings attached, Idols they could control rather than the other way around.

35 years ago, I was working for E.R. Squibb & Sons as a drug rep. Since leaving medical school I had run a construction crew and a concrete plant and now I was calling on doctors to dispense samples and tell them all the reasons they should prescribe my drug. I was making a good living. A very good living. But something was missing. I believed that Jesus had come to bring life and that abundantly. For the last 10 years I had grown in my faith and in my knowledge and love of God, but lately things had stalled. I think you probably know just what I mean. Things are going well and all of a sudden you’re just stuck. Life happens, a job is lost, a marriage fails, health is in decline. Or you just feel stuck. You’ve got everything you thought you ever wanted, but something is missing. You want to believe that God has a purpose and plan but you find yourself praying, “How can I know, Lord? How can I know?”

Then today’s story is for you. It doesn’t run on fuel, but on faith. In the Upper Story we start to see God’s presence, power, and plan to get us back as he builds the nation of Israel. It is in the And every nation, every story has to start somewhere, with someone. God chose Ur and Abram.

“The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will

curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

“So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.”

If you’re new to the Bible, and you don’t know the end of the story, you might be thinking, “Now if I was God, I don’t think I’d start with a gutless, childless, old man like Abram, who had enriched himself by marketing for the competition.” But all the way through the Bible, this is just the sort of reprobate that He picks to bless.

That is certainly the case with Abram. Not only are he and his wife Sarai getting up there in age, but also Sarai has never even given birth. Surely there’s someone more qualified than Abram. Someone more faithful. Someone younger. No offense to any 75-year olds, but I would be afraid he wouldn’t even survive the trip, much less populate a new nation.

But this is exactly who God chooses. Why? What does Abram have that God is going use to move his Upper Story forward? Hebrews 11:8 gives us a clue:

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

There it is. Abraham had faith and obeyed-- in spite of whatever happened after. For example, Abram and Sarai would experience famine and have to move again. They would experience separation from family that had traveled with them. But surely hardest of all was when they experienced...well, nothing. God had promised a child and 24 years later...there was still nothing.

Maybe you know how they felt. Maybe you’re still waiting for an answer to your prayer. I would struggle with 24 days but 24 years? Surely Abram must have felt like God had pulled the old bait and switch on him. So far, he had only heard the sizzle, and hadn’t seen anything of a steak. But Romans 4 tells us:

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

Well there went that theory. That’s 25 years after God made the promise. 25 years before Abraham would hold Isaac in his arms. Yet Scripture tells us Abraham did not waver and his faith, get this – was actually strengthened. Who is this guy?

Is Abraham some kind of super-Jew? More faithful, smarter, braver, better than the rest of humanity? No, Abraham could screw up a two car funeral.

Maybe he grew up in the perfect home, a Father Knows Best kind of home. Not even close. Dad was an idol maker and he married his sister like he was from Mississippi or something.

Maybe he just had some divine power I don’t have. No, he was an old man with feet of clay.

Whatever it was, I don’t seem to have it and we still haven’t answered the question, “How can I know?” How can I know God will keep his promise? What did Abraham know that allowed him to trust that deeply?

God came to Abram in a vision 15 years after the initial promise is made but still 10 years before the promise is fulfilled. He takes Abram outside and has him look up in the sky. God tells Abram that his offspring will be as many as the stars in the sky. But he doesn’t stop there. He gives him an additional promise in verse 7. God says, in Genesis 15:

“I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, “**How can I know...** that I will gain possession of it?”

Now we can relate to this guy.

Abraham, full of faith, brings this question to the only One who could provide an answer. And

here's his answer:

"So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away."

Now this may not seem like much of an answer to us but in ancient times, it would've been understood...a blood covenant was about to be made. A binding contract.

Tim Keller points out that from history and archeology, we know many times this type of covenant was used between a king and a lesser king, or a conquered king, or a servant. They would slaughter the animals and cut them in half so they could walk down an aisle between them. What they were saying is, may what has happened to these animals happen to me if I break this covenant.

Now that's intense. I'm thinking we should try this at the next wedding we have here. Forget the flower petals. The bride's family will bring a heifer, a goat, a ram, and a couple of birds. Might be difficult to get past the worship committee but think of what it might accomplish."

So Abram has brought the sacrifices and laid them out. Listen to what happened next:

"When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."

Do you see what just happened? God is saying if I don't keep this covenant, if I don't build this nation, may it be to me, may this curse fall on me.

And here's the part I hadn't seen before. Did you notice who didn't walk between the pieces? Abram remains on the sideline and God walks through alone. Do you see what that means? That means God is saying if I fail, may it be unto me, but Abram if you fail, if the nation of Israel fails, may it also be unto me. May my body be broken and my blood be poured out. Can you see where this is headed?

All this time I had been admiring Abram for the faith that allowed him to go 'all in' to put everything on the line-- family, his inheritance, his pride, his future-- to follow after a God he had met in a dream. And when he pushes God for proof, to show him why he can believe the promise made to him, we find that Abram's success, the future on the new nation that God wanted to build through him, was not because Abram had gone "all in", but Because God had!

How can I know? Because God would one day tell Abram to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Abraham would obey, but God would rescue Isaac. Some 2000 years later in that same location, God would sacrifice his only son. This time there would be no one would come to the rescue.

God would honor the covenant he made with Abraham and through his Son would extend a new covenant to us. And like Abraham, we receive this new covenant through faith.

Want faith like Abraham? Then you must do what he did. He trusted, he obeyed, and he went all in. And when his faith wavered, he wasn't afraid to ask God, "***How can I know?***"

God answered by going all in and placing his very deity on the line and Abraham found a place to place all his hope.

And perhaps the best news of all...you can too.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me...

Dear Father, we worry and fret about so many things. We go from day to day wasted by cares for physical health and success and money and for a thousand and one trivial things. We know we shouldn't be anxious about such things, and yet here we are with hearts full fret and fear.

Still our noisy and stormy spirits. Come with power and cast out the terrors that rob us of our peace and torment us with fear. Come with grace to quicken our dreams and deeds with the knowledge of your steadfast presence and love. Then, assured that we are yours, grant us the faith that will forever

banish our fears, both for ourselves and for those you have entrusted to our earthly care. Grant us such certainty of you that we may know in this world and in whatever worlds may come, that we are yours, that our loved ones are yours, and that you will never let us go. Comfort our fevered hearts with this faith, and help us entrust the whole of who we are and who we dream of becoming to your sovereign care; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Lift High the Cross", #371 in our *Hymnals*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"The Lord Will Provide"

(to the tune of St. Denio or "Immortal. Invisible, God Only Wise")

Though troubles assail us and dangers affright,
Though friends should all fail us and foes all unite,
Yet one thing secures us, whatever betide,
The promise assures us, "The Lord will provide."

His call we obey, as did Abram of old:
We know not the way, but faith makes bold;
For though we are strangers, we have a sure guide,
And trust in all dangers, "The Lord will provide."

No strength of our own and no goodness we claim;
Yet, since we have known of the Savior's great name,
In this our strong tower for safety we hide:
The Lord is our power, "The Lord will provide."

*THE BENEDICTION

You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there. He has a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells in you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in His grace and love and power. Amen.

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"God Be With You"

God be with you 'til we meet again; Loving counsels guide, uphold you;
With His sheep securely fold you; God be with you 'til we meet again.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis